

Confusing signs the last thing city's drivers need

One of the fundamental ingredients of road safety is predictability. So long as traffic rules are consistent, and road users and pedestrians adhere to those rules consistently, the movements of pedestrians and vehicles become predictable and therefore easier to anticipate. Indeed, the most often heard complaint about road safety in Hong Kong is that drivers are unpredictable, especially since they do not seem to be able to find their indicator switches. Drivers switch lanes or make sudden turns into roads without warning. The unpredictability of such actions makes Hong Kong roads dangerous.

The city's Transport Department needlessly contributes to the unpredictability of drivers, though. There is such inconsistency in the planning of our road system that sometimes, one literally has to turn left in order to turn right. Being in the right lane at the earliest opportunity is key to safe driving in Hong Kong, since there are many times you cannot leave for a considerable distance. Despite this being the case, Hong Kong road signs do little to help drivers get into the correct lane early; very rarely do signs prepare drivers for their exits. It is no wonder they have to switch lanes suddenly because they will only know where to turn when they get there.

The poor positioning of signs adds to the confusion. The first nine months of last year saw 74 complaints about poor signposting, up 17 per cent from the corresponding period the previous year. Indeed, ask any experienced Hong Kong driver and they will have their favourite absurdly positioned road sign. Many are hidden behind trees or traffic lights, and some are not visible until a driver has passed the point at which lanes are marked with double white lines, meaning it is too late for them to get into the correct lane. The inefficacy of such road signs makes one wonder whether those who planned or designed them are road users themselves.

Hong Kong has a reputable civil service with efficient administrators, as is evident from the high quality of many public services. Unfortunately, the chaos on our roads is a glaring exception to this.

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